

To: House Elections & Ethics Committee  
From: Lawrence Kestenbaum, Washtenaw County Clerk (MACC)  
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Less than ten years ago, an election could be held on practically any day of the year. Even regularly scheduled elections were all over the place: February and April elections in some cities, March elections in villages, June school board elections, in addition to August and November elections in both even and odd years. Some elections were on Monday, others Tuesday.

Moreover, any taxing jurisdiction could call a special election for a millage at any time. There were notorious “stealth” elections for passing significant tax increases with little public awareness.

The election consolidation law, which took effect at the beginning of 2005, limited most elections to just four dates, one each in February, May, August, and November. At the time, this seemed like a radical step.

But the concern behind these new bills shows that the four election schedule did not go far enough. February millage elections can still be “stealth” elections, just like in the bad old days.

The fundamental problem here is that we allow for having elections every 90 days. That is too much! Let’s get rid of the awkward February and August dates, and consolidate ALL scheduled elections to May and November.

The current August primary (followed by a 14 day canvass period, followed by recounts) is too close to November. It’s very difficult to meet federal deadlines for getting November ballots printed and mailed to overseas military voters. To miss those deadlines would mean having to hold an election open past Election Day – a consequence intended to be onerous.

Other states in our region, including Ohio and Indiana, hold their primaries in early May. That’s because it’s the most sensible time for primary elections.

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May and November are six months apart; this evens out the election workload through the year. That would be the most efficient and thrifty schedule we could have.

Why should Michigan taxpayers be spending unnecessary millions of dollars on more frequent elections that draw little participation?

In partisan races below the state level, the real race is usually in the primary. Since primaries are critical for determining leadership at all levels of government, we ought not relegate them to the depths of summer, when many people are away.

Two specific concerns with these bills:

(1) The definition of which millages go on which election dates needs to be crystal clear.

(2) The ballot language required for millage elections needs to be greatly reduced. We want to avoid having to use two physical ballots per voter.